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ABSTRACT

This document addresses the advantages and disadvantages of a required bibliographic instruction program at Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois. Issues addressed include: the public relations efforts; the planning and implementation of the program; the staff requirements; and the impact on library operations and services. Course requirements, methodology, and a general assessment of over 10 years of student evaluations and reactions are discussed. Other issues presented relate to "helpful hints" for instructional consideration; the general content and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this program. (Author/MAB)

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# A "REQUIRED" BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION COURSE: A LIBRARY ADMINISTRATOR S ASSESSMENT

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## ABSTRACT

This document will speak to the advantages and disadvantages of a "required" bibliographic instruction program at Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois. Addressed will be such issues as: the public relations efforts; the planning and implementation of the program; the staff requirements; and the impact on library operations and services.

Course requirements, methodology, and general assessment of over ten years of student evaluations and reactions will be addressed. Other issues presented relate to "helpful hints" for instructional consideration; general content and approach to the course; and a library administrator's general assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this program.

This is the beginning of the paper.

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# A "REQUIRED" BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION COURSE: A LIBRARY ADMINISTRATOR'S ASSESSMENT

## INTRODUCTION

The "official" Minutes of the Millikin University Faculty Meeting of April 5, 1978, contained the following item:*1

> "On behalf of the Executive Committee, Dean Forbes [Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences], moved approval of a new, one-semester credit hour course in Bibliographic Instruction to be required of all students new to Millikin starting next fall semester, 1978-79. The course increases general education requirements to a minimum of 33 hours and a maximum of 37 hours. The new course will be graded on an A-F scale, and a proficiency examination will be offered. The course will be evaluated by the General Education Committee. Since it is a general education requirement, a student transferring to Millikin after completing a two-year degree program at a community college will be exempt from taking the course. A transfer student who has not completed an Associate Degree, however, would be required to take this course and meet other general education requirements as well. The motion was seconded and approved."

With the passage of this motion, over twelve years ago, faculty, administration and librarians acknowledged the fact that a Bibliographic Instruction program was indeed essential and be required of students at Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois. In taking this step, they were parties to the establishment of what might well be, the FIRST required, for credit, undergraduate bibliographic instruction [here after referred to as "B.I.] course in the State of Illinois.

Looking back over these past twelve years, and having had the opportunity to assess the program's impact on the institution's curricular offerings, staffing issues, library operations, and reactions of students and faculty, I thought a "reflection" on this this administrator's part, might prove helpful and informative. Organizationally, I would like to approach this pres-

entation by attending to the following topical subdivisions:

--Politicizing your importance in the campus environment, or..."Taking a Pro-active Posture."

--Planning the B.I. program and dealing with institutional/curricular exigencies

--Attending to library-related/B.I. instructional and operational staffing demands and needs

--Assessing and evaluating outcomes: or, "Would We Do It Again?"....and if so, "Would We Do Anything Differently?"

## POLITICIZING YOUR IMPORTANCE/TAKING A PRO-ACTIVE POSTURE

There is no doubt in this administrator's mind that the IMAGE of the librarians on the campus--the "reputation" of the library and its perceived importance in the academic community it serves--and if I might add, the "Service Quotient" or (SQ), were all critical factors in the successful passage and approval of the B.I. proposal. It is my belief, that we must recognize and accept the fact that a college or university is a POLITICAL entity. As such, there are constituencies and component parts, both internal and external to the classroom, which exert power and influence. We, as librarians, need to position ourselves in this political environment as: "significant participants", as positive/pro-active/equal partners with our faculty and administrative colleagues in the institution's educational program.....if we are to achieve desired outcomes. Had we, here at Millikin University, not done this PRIOR to submitting our B.I. course proposal....and exceedingly well....I am certain that the outcome of the faculty vote would have been decidedly different.

In this "positioning", one needs to identify and enlist the active support of those faculty colleagues and administrators who you know to be library advocates. Here I refer to those faculty and administrators who use the library, who recognize its importance, and who require their students to use it as well.

Identify, document, and recall particular faculty members' research interests. Attend to those interests so that faculty colleagues recognize the value and importance of the library and librarians in the university environment. Should the library, for accreditation or other reasons, become the depository for various discipline course syllabi...peruse these and offer assistance in updating bibliographies, term project assignments, etc. Stay informed and browse the literature for continuing education opportunities soliciting the involvement of BOTH librarians and faculty members/administrators, as participants in "cooperative educational experiences." Utilize any and all institutional communication channels available [campus-wide faculty newsletters, faculty meetings, library newsletters, Academic Council/Deans' meetings, Alumni publications, etc.] to publicize the library's services, efficient operations, final reports of accreditation team visits which speak to the quality of library services offered. If a Faculty Council/Committee on Curriculum exists, seek membership in this important body to stay informed and aware of future directions of the institution's educational program. Extol and verbalize the benefits and advantages for inclusion of librarians on such a committee as relates to academic support and library resource implications for such future academic planning considerations.

## PLANNING THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION PROGRAM: DEALING WITH INSTITUTIONAL/CURRICULAR EXIGENCIES PRESENT

In the early stages of planning for the B.I. course, we had to become the "resident experts/scholars", if you will, in this area. An exhaustive review of the literature on the subject of B.I. was conducted. Similarly, we had to familiarize ourselves thoroughly, with the institution's "curricular infrastructure" and enlist the aid of colleagues. Those faculty/administrative colleagues who play a key role in that structure include: the Registrar, the

the Deans of the various Schools/Colleges, the Provost/Vice-President for Academic Affairs, the Departmental Chairpersons, the members of the Curriculum Committee, and of course, individual faculty members.

As "primary architects" of this course, we determined after numerous meetings and discussions, that based upon our findings in the literature and consultation with others, that for our purposes, the course needed to:

--be REQUIRED and for CREDIT;
--contain a "proficiency test" for both course and institutional competency requirements;
--meet a SPECIFIED NUMBER OF HOURS/CLASS PERIODS, in order to accommodate institutional credit requirements as well as for students to attain the level of "skills achievement" desired;
--be taken by students as Freshmen, or as soon after admission to the University as possible, to be of most benefit to them;
--be offered in at least five to six sections/per semester to accommodate enrollment numbers as well as keeping individual section sizes to a manageable number [30-35 students per section], based upon the number of B.I. instructors utilized;
--be taught be Reference/Public Service Librarians, with periodic relief being offered by the Library Director and even a Technical Services Librarian, if the latter chooses;
--be "staggered" as relates to presentation of instructional content to accommodate limited library tools/resources available, while at the same time, facilitating that access so that only "half" of the students enrolled would be consulting the same tools/resources at the same time;
--include a "pre-test" administered during the first class session to determine library competencies and achievement levels of each student in the class. This is also helpful in determining "instructional parameters" as they pertain to each class section. A "post-test" is administered as well, at the end of the course to assess what learning/progress has been achieved.

Our "timing for the submission of this B.I. proposal, as a course in our General Education Core requirements, could not have occurred at a more opportune time. Simultaneously, with the completion of the course proposal, the University's Curriculum Committee was just beginning a major review and reassessment of the University's General Education Core requirements.

## ATTENDING TO LIBRARY-RELATED/B.I. INSTRUCTIONAL AND AND OPERATIONAL STAFFING NEEDS AND DEMANDS

After several years of experience, some lessons have been learned, as relates to the impact of such a B.I. program on library staffing considerations in general:

--General library staff meetings, work schedules of of librarians and other "day-to-day" operational activities need to be planned and coordinated around the scheduled class meeting times of B.I. course;

--Varying teaching schedules for B.I. instructors need to be considered so that at least one Reference Librarian is available for general library patron informational queries;

--B.I. lesson plans/teaching modules need to be continually revised and updated as new informational tools/resources are published and/or revised. Research strategy, problem-solving homework assignments/exercises similarly have to be changed and altered. Such preparation and revision necessitates additional "released time" from assigned public service responsibilities and also requires an additional, isolated work-area for attending to such matters;

--One needs to be aware that there are "cost ramifications" for such a program as well: instructional materials, reproduction of homework assignments and student workers hired to assist in this activity;

--Although advanced, upper-class student assistants may assist the B.I. instructional librarians in many ways, these librarians still must invest considerable time in reviewing and grading some portions of homewook assignments. "One-on-one interviews" with students enrolled in the course occur frequently, for a variety of reasons, and such activities necessitate additional "precious time" of the instructional librarians;

--To accommodate the time demands placed upon these B.I. librarians, schedules and time demands of other librarians, not associated with the B.I. instructional program, are impacted as well.

As an administrator, who must view the entire spectrum of library operations and services, I would be dishonest were I not to admit that "negatives" do exist in a setting where a B.I. program, of this type, exists. But I must also, as a pragmatist and generalist, say that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantoages....which leads nicely into the concluding portion of this presentation.

## ASSESSING AND EVALUATING OUTCOMES

The concluding portion of this presentation will address the two questions posed earlier, namely:

> --"If you had it all to do over again, would you?", and
> --"If so, would you do anything differently?"

The answer to the first question is an unequivocal and most emphatic: YES!!! In retrospect, it was our opinion then, and is now, that a B.I. program is essential in the educational program of Millikin University. It is definitely a means of improving the academic quality of the institution. The fashionable "buzzword" presently, is INFORMATION LITERACY. Such literacy is viewed by some as a "goal/a level of competency to be achieved," whereas bibliographic instruction is viewed as a "methodology or means for achieving that goal." Others see it as a CONTINUUM...a logical development of the educational development of the individual..."from library orientation to bibliographic instruction to information literacy."*2 It is not my intent here to become embroiled in a debate over semantics. Whatever terminology one uses, we feel that developing in students the ability to efficiently and effectively acquire the information they need is a skill which we believe is essential and necessary.

There are many ways of teaching students to use libraries effectively and helping them to resolve whatever information needs they may have. Our program here at Millikin was not modelled on that of other institutions, such as Earlham or Wisconsin-Parkside. It is our feeling that each institution should be left the option of determining which model of B.I. best serves its objectives and the needs of its own students. This latter position is one, I am happy to say, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education subscribes to as well.

I applaud, wholeheartedly, the far-sightedness of the Middle States

Commission on Higher Education, for their recent position on B.I. and its place in institutions of higher education. In its "Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation," is found the following statement:*3

> "The centrality of a library/learning resources center in the educational mission of an institution deserves more than rhetoric and must be supported by more than lip service. An active and continuous program of bibliographic instruction is essential to realize this goal."

At long last, accrediting agencies are recognizing that the size of library collections alone, is not, in and of itself, sufficient...but that instruction in the "use of the library" is essential as well. I would suggest that other accrediting agencies should take note of the example that the Middle States Commission has established. I, for one, applaud the excellent and far-sighted example set.

In attending to the last question..."Would you do anything differently?" ...here again I would respond in the affirmative. Certain aspects of our B.I. program are continually being revised. As an administrator however, I feel there is room for improvement, and indeed, a need for considering new initiatives. Areas requiring further refinement and attention, in my opinion, include:

- --reconsidering and reassessing our "proficiency exam" and the criteria used for permitting a student to "proficiency out" of the course;
- --considering the option of a B.I. course of shorter duration and which meets more frequently than is presently the case. [Presently, students meet once a week for a 16-week period. An alternative option might be to meet <u>twice a week</u> for a period of <u>eight weeks</u>. Advantages and disadvantages need to be weighed and evaluated;
- --developing an evaluation instrument which might include both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the question of "long-term retention of library-use skills/competencies." We have addressed, to some degree, the "short term" effects, but have not attended to any long-term assessment of skills acquired and retained by students;

--expanding upon the development of "critical thinking" skills and the evaluation of information obtained and used by students. Nancy Totten, in a recent RQ issue, speaks to some of these, namely:*4

  --assessing the reliability of sources used in obtaining the information needed;
  --distinquishing between fact and opinion;
  --identifying hidden assumptions;
  --recognizing "bias, logical fallacy, and irrelevance"

--mainstreaming the newer technologies and associated resources [databases] into the search strategy approaches presently used.

Millikin University has just recently completed a "Strategic Planning Document" for the period 1990-1994, which will serve as a blueprint for future academic planning and direction. We are elated that the faculty and administration have reaffirmed in this document...the importance of bibliographic instruction at this University. In a final section of that document, entitled, "Essentials for a Baccalaureate Education at Millikin University," one finds the following statement:*5

> "...To accomplish our mission, faculty agree that a baccalaureate education should provide the knowledge, skills, and experiences to ensure that students will be able to: [among other areas mentioned]
>
> ---Develop skills required to become INFORMATION LITERATE, including the ability to access, locate, retrieve and efficiently use information."

We, as professional librarians at Millikin University, believe that this reaffirmation by the faculty and administration is indeed appropriate and speaks well of what has been accomplished over these many years. We emphasize in the B.I. program the "long-term effects" we believe such a learning experience will have for the students...not only while at Millikin...but in their life-long learning pursuits as well. Only time will tell if that which we have taught will be of value and significance in their life's work.

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Millikin University Faculty Minutes", Millikin University, (April 5, 1978): pg. 1.

2. "Literacy," Wilson Library Bulletin, (March 1990): pp. 22-23.

3. Lutzker, Marilyn, "Bibliographic Instruction and Accreditation in Higher Education," College & Research Libraries News, (January 1990): pp. 14-18. [Commission on Higher Education. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Characteristics of Excellence in Education: Standards for Accreditation. Rev. ed. Philadelphia, Pa.: 1989. p. 35.]

4. Totten, Nancy Thomas. "Teaching Students to Evaluate Information: A Justification." Reference Quarterly (RQ), (Spring 1990): pp. 348-354.

5. Millikin University. Stretegic Planning Document: "Millikin University-A Strategic Plan Embracing the Challenges of the 21st Century," Appendix I, pg. 2.

[The author, Dr. Charles E. Hale, Library Director, Staley Library, Millikin University, Decatur, IL., 62522, became the director of the Staley Library, Millikin University in June, 1976. His commitment and that of his present Head of Public Services/Bibliographic Instruction, Mrs. Virginia McQuistion, and other reference librarians who have taught the course, including Mrs. Gwenn Neville, current Head of B.I. Program, have contributed to the success of Millikin's course.]